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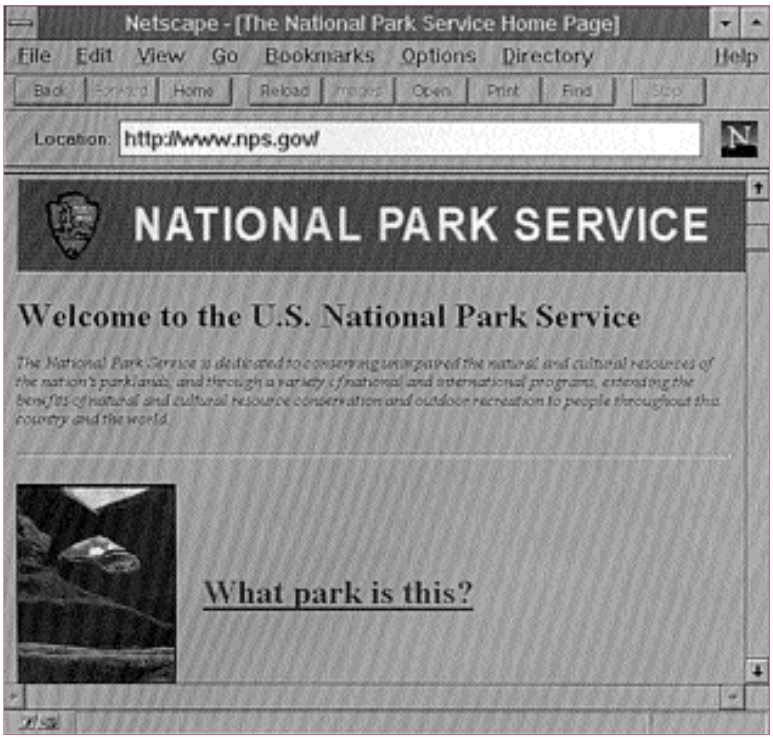
# Developing a National Park Service World Wide Website
## A Brief History

It's been described as an electronic insurrection. A ground swell of resources and creativity has been set free, and the key that opened the flood gates of this creativity is the World Wide Web (the Web). The Web, the graphical medium of the Internet, has put a whole new face on the way information is shared inside organizations and around the world. The Web has empowered millions who can now share their stories and information complete with pictures, sound, and even video.

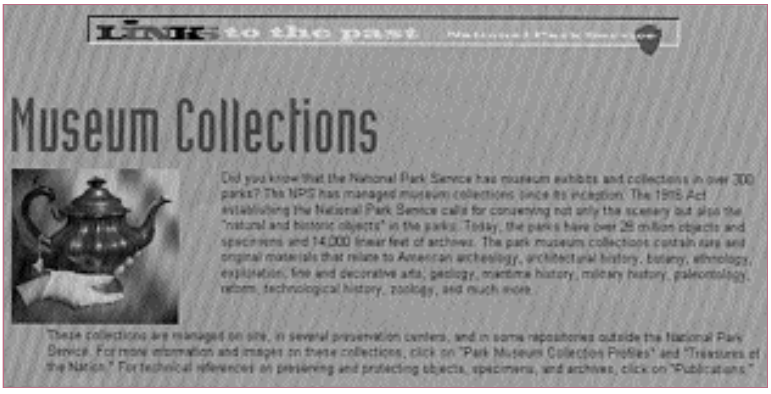



*The National Park Service World Wide Web home page.*

The marriage between the National Park Service and one of the world's most innovative information technologies is easier to understand by looking at the purpose of the Internet. At its root, the Internet is designed as an information tool, and as such, it becomes a natural extension of the suite of interpretative tools used by the National Park Service staff to convey the experiences and uniquely American spirit that the nation's park lands embody. The importance of the Internet as a method of interpretation should not be underestimated.

In April 1994, an Executive Order required federal agencies to provide spatial data online for public access. The Internet was clearly the best and most accessible way to provide information across the United States. It was clear that the NPS should provide more than just raw spatial (Geographic Information System [GIS]) data on the Internet, and before long a small group of people began developing data applications on the Web that would be attractive to users. By October 1994, fueled by the Yosemite home page developed by Joe Coho of the Western Regional Office, Patrick Gregerson and the author developed basic home pages for the parks in the then National Capital Region (NCR). A discussion group was formed within NCR to discuss the potential and future direction for the NCR Websites.

By January 1995, this truly servicewide revolution had caught the attention of the Director and his staff. The Director applauded the work done on the Web, formalized the program and gave it his support. A small group, made up of WASO program staff, regional staff, a superintendent, and other park staff, was formed to plan out the development of the NPS Web program. That same month, the first conceptual framework for the NPS Website was presented at a national teleconfer-

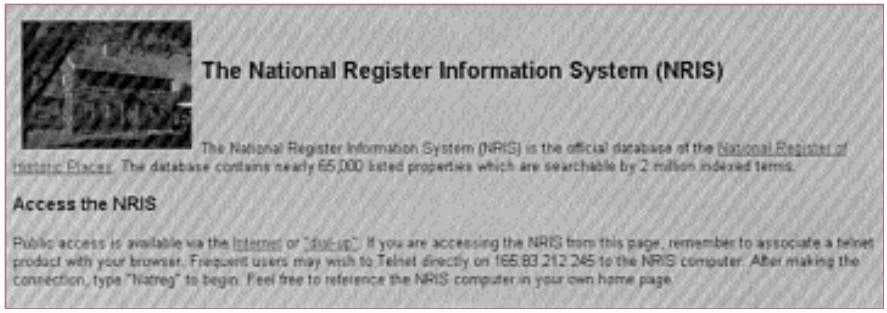



*The NPS Museum Collections home page includes profiles of over 300 NPS museum collections; a Treasures of the Nation exhibit containing images and descriptions of nationally significant objects and specimens;and bibliographies and publications created by the NPS Museum Management program.*


*The National Park Service Archeology home page.*

ence, and based on that framework, members of the team agreed to work toward completing the first stage of the NPS Website by March 1995.

For the next two months, an intensive effort was made by team members to flesh out a comprehensive Website for the entire National Park Service. Each program office was primarily concerned with developing its respective home page, but offices with more expertise assisted in the development of multiple home pages. Dave Duran, of the NBS (formerly the NPS GIS Washington Office) who posted the first draft of the "National Park Service homepage" months earlier, worked closely with the author in setting up and building the current NPS Web Server, even as Dave was developing the NBS Website. The Denver Service Center's Technical Information Center (DSC) scanned the entire Red Book Index (The National Parks: Index 1993) and sent it to the NCR where the file was converted into Web hypertext mark-up language (HTML) format. This text was the basis for each of the 368 park home pages. The graphic headers for each page were developed largely thanks to Russell Bellknap of the DSC's Eastern Team. Each program area of the Service contributed to the rapid growth of the Website. It is this "distributed" nature of the Web and its authors that is the real power and force behind the exponential growth of the Web in general, and the NPS site in specific.




*The National Register Information System home page.*

By March 1995, much of the work that had been outlined in the original meeting two months earlier had been completed. Two review and comment sessions were held to help hammer out the kinks in the new NPS Website. The first session, based in Denver, consisted of approximately 20 interested parties from the natural resources, planning, and other communities with the NPS. The second session, held in Washington, DC, provided a similar opportunity for interested parties and other NPS Web developers to shape the growth and look of the NPS presence on the Web. By National Park Week the NPS Website had grown from a prototype to a full-blown vehicle for conveying interesting information to the public and to NPS employees throughout the Service.

Soon after National Park Week, Steve Grosz, Steve Pittleman, Chip Jenkins, Betsy Chittenden, the author and many others began the task of producing the first servicewide vision document aimed at guiding the further development of the NPS Website. By early August the *NPS Web Primer* and the *NPS Web Manual* were released via cc:Mail. Using these two documents, employees throughout the Service have added to the growth of NPS's Web development.

The interest and commitment to the NPS Web development process by a wide range of NPS employees is a reflection of the growing interest in the larger Internet community as a whole. The transformation from the one-or-two person effort into a servicewide effort occurred faster than many previously thought possible.

The NPS efforts have not been lost on the vast audience of the Internet. Those who have contributed to this process should be proud of the fact that the NPS Website was rated in the top 5% of all most popular sites on the Web by Point Survey. Through the dedication of this "grassroots" effort, much has already been accomplished and with the growing interest by park staff, who knows where this might lead?

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*Paul Handly is the National Park Service Webmaster.*